

Community research guidelines set stage for 'real world' scholarship

April 13 2010



Dr. Jocelyn Taliaferro consults with one of the students participating in the community-based research course. Credit: North Carolina State University

Academia is sometimes viewed as an "ivory tower" environment with little connection to the real world, but new research from North Carolina State University should help academics striving to overcome that reputation. A new paper lays out guidelines that can be used to develop and implement partnerships between academics and local communities to foster research efforts that address social problems.

"The goal of the project was to take research out of our labs and offices and put it into the hands of communities in such a way that it could be used to address real world problems - such as addressing substance-abuse treatment needs or improving student achievement," says Dr. Jocelyn Taliaferro, an associate professor of social work at NC State and co-

author of the paper. "What we learned here could help other people develop similar programs in an array of disciplines."

At issue is a community-based research course developed out of necessity by Taliaferro and her co-author, Dr. Natalie Ames. Taliaferro and Ames were doing a series of research projects with community partners, and needed student involvement. However, they did not have sufficient resources to hire [students](#) as research assistants. Instead, they developed a program in which undergraduates served as research assistants and, in return, garnered hands-on experience and received elective academic credit. Ames is also an associate professor of [social work](#) at NC State.

The program was a success. "It helped our students connect research to practice. It helped them understand how the research process works. And it contributed substantially to the success of the research projects themselves," Taliaferro says. "We definitely plan on replicating the program again in the future, depending on what research projects are ongoing. And there's no reason why this wouldn't work in other disciplines."

But, while successful, the researchers also found that incorporating students into community-based research projects was a lot of work. "We learned some lessons that we think will be useful for other researchers interested in community engagement," Taliaferro says.

For example, Taliaferro says, "we learned that implementing a program like this one requires a great deal of flexibility in terms of scheduling. You need to accommodate the schedules of both students and community members, which are often very different. And you need to make sure that students know from the outset that a program like this involves a significant time commitment - well beyond what is expected in the classroom."

Similarly, faculty must realize that a program like this one is "much more than a classroom experience," Taliaferro says. "It involves hours of student training, preparing community partners to work with students and coordination effort."

Researchers interested in incorporating students into community-based research should also be prepared to work with students to ensure they are comfortable with their role in an overarching research project that likely began before they arrived and would continue after the course has ended. "This is significant," Taliaferro says, "because it helps students appreciate the importance of the research process - and it lets them know that their work is valuable, even if they are not there at the conclusion."

One last key finding: you'll need go-getters. Taliaferro and Ames found that the students who chose to participate in their program were already active in campus and community affairs. "You need students who are intrinsically motivated," Taliaferro says, "to go beyond what is normally expected of undergraduates."

More information: The research, "Implementing an Elective BSW Community-Based Evaluation Research Course," is published in the March issue of the Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work.

Provided by North Carolina State University

Citation: Community research guidelines set stage for 'real world' scholarship (2010, April 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-04-guidelines-stage-real-world-scholarship.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.